

BOOK REVIEWS

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The Scars of Venus. A History of Venereology. By J D Oriel. Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag 1994. (£65, pp 248.) ISBN 3-540-19844.

Venereology has often been considered by many to be a speciality with a narrow spectrum of illness, but it should not be forgotten that the venereal diseases have always been a major cause of concern to physicians and their challenge has occupied some of the greatest intellects in European medicine. This book reviews the history of the venereal diseases and the many doctors and scientists who have studied and written about them. It is erudite, readable, balanced and witty as well as providing ample references, a list of "recommended further reading" and an accurate index. Almost all of the many individuals mentioned are honoured with a small portrait, a biography which is astonishingly complete and manages to tell us what manner of men the subjects were, how hard they worked, and often, how they died.

What a wonderful collection of characters they were. Dr Oriel's scholarship allows us to appreciate exactly what it was they contributed to the medicine of their day, and he has made the often complex chronology of these events easy to follow. The first chapter is devoted to the origins of venereal disease and not surprisingly, does not offer any new explanations of the few facts that are known. A quotation from Voltaire heads the chapter and neatly summarises the situation—Venereal Diseases are like the fine arts; it is pointless to ask who invented them.

The history of syphilis over the centuries, and the many labyrinthine paths of research and discovery which were followed by so many doctors throughout Europe before the natural history of the disease and its cause were understood and effective remedies eventually developed, is expertly covered in six chapters. Most doctors will consider they have a fair knowledge of the "giants" involved in this story but the detail so clearly provided here will show them what a broad canvas was being painted. With names such as Hunter, Bell, Ricord, Schaudinn, Metchnikoff, Osler, Erlich, Virchow, Pasteur, Willis, Fournier, Charcot, Mott, Hutchinson, the list seems endless yet all come alive in the text (one cannot help being impressed by the wonderful beards and moustaches on show, the prize perhaps being taken by a superb pair of moustachios worn by August Ducrey).

Gonorrhoea, pre- and post-Neisser is

expertly covered with, for example, Hunter's experiments, confusions, and conclusions being contrasted with Bell's careful observations and clear descriptions. The bacteriological saga of the discovery of the gonococcus is well documented as is that of therapy. Included is Ricord's famous advice on how to catch the disease.

Herpes, warts, chlamydial infections and non gonococcal urethritis are all efficiently dealt with.

A chapter entitled *Venereologists and Others* tells of the rise of specialists in the management of venereal disease in Europe, the United Kingdom and the New World and of the provision of services for those infected ranging from the early efforts of the church in medieval times, to the clinics and hospitals of the 20th century.

A final chapter with the prescient title *No Happy Ending* debates the medical and social problems presented by the rise of the so called "second generation" infections along with HIV disease and draws attention to the fear that funds devoted to this new illness may lead to the neglect of other sexually transmitted infections; the recent rise in early syphilis in some areas is possibly due to this phenomenon.

This is an excellent book which is set to become a classic and it will be read with pleasure by anyone with an interest in the history of medicine and is required reading for those practising the modern speciality of genito-urinary medicine.

J K OATES

Syphilis in Shakespeare's England. By Johannes Fabricius. London. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. (Pp 296 £22.50. Paperback.) ISBN 1-85302-270-5.

This scholarly work will give immense enjoyment to those with an interest in the literature and art of the 15th to 17th century or in the history of syphilis. The author leads the reader into the entangled world of the church, literature, art, sex and medicine. His preface clearly outlines the aims of his treatise, and briefly reviews the major works which have previously appraised the influence of venereal disease in general and syphilis in particular on literature.

In the chapter aptly entitled *The Sinister Shepherd* the epidemiology of syphilis as seen through the writings of such notables as Dryden, Bacon, Moore and Shakespeare is explored. An extract from Rowlands, *The Knave of Hearts* exemplifies the directness of the writers of the day.

This Gentleman, with Ores hath past the ruer,

And very pockey newes he can deliuer:

From Lambeth-Marsh he newly is transported,

Where he hath beene most filthily consorted.

The origins of the various terms for the disease such as *The French Pox*, *The Serpentine Disease* and *Syphilis* itself are also expounded upon in this chapter.

The following chapter, *Wonder Drugs for the Pox* chronicles the use of mercury and guaiac in the treatment of syphilis. Shakespeare's recognition of the various treatments is analysed in relationship to his use of imagery. *Hamlet* and *Henry IV* will never be viewed in the same light again!

Further analysis of Shakespeare's use of imagery is made in a later chapter dedicated

solely to this literary tool. This otherwise well written and entertaining chapter is punctuated by several pages of tables and figures which I found irritatingly difficult to follow and added little to the discussion.

Overall this book is well presented and the reproduction of engravings, woodcuts and paintings were particularly pleasing; only the poor quality photographs of the rash of secondary syphilis and a penile chancre, both of which are superfluous, detracted from the overall quality of illustrations. This is not a book which one can easily read in a few hours. One needs time to fully appreciate this work. It is a book which one will be able to return to and obtain much pleasure from on subsequent readings.

DAVID ROWEN

An Atlas of Vulval Disease. A Combined Dermatological, Gynaecological and Venereological Approach. By Michele Leibowitch, Richard Staughton, Sallie Neill, Simon Barton, Roger Marwood. London: Martin Dunitz. (Pp 165, £49.95.) 1995. ISBN 1-85317-127-1.

Diseases of the vulva may present to a variety of practitioners, and this book is aimed at increasing awareness of such conditions and to promote the benefits of a multidisciplinary approach to their management. It is a well illustrated text with around 250 colour photographs of clinical conditions and complementing histological sections, supplemented by diagrams. These cover both common and more unusual vulval diseases, and also illustrate typical extragenital lesions where appropriate. The book is easy to read and the layout is good with highlighted "checklists" of appropriate management.

An initial introduction covers basic vulval anatomy; examination and investigation are also discussed, although insufficient detail is given about the practicalities of screening for infection. This is followed by chapters on normal variants, inflammatory diseases, ulcerating and blistering disorders, pilosebaceous inflammation, infections and infestations, tumours, intraepithelial neoplasia, malignant disease, pigmented lesions, vulval diseases in childhood, and psychological aspects of vulval disease. Three appendices describe commonly suggested treatments, classification of topical corticosteroids, and give a sample patient information leaflet.

The text is short with basic details and management suggestions; it is easy to refer to and informative, although guidelines for cervical smears in wart virus infection and herpes are somewhat confusing. Common conditions are well illustrated with a variety of photographs, and a good range of conditions are covered, with a high standard of prints. However, having highlighted the difficulty of diagnosis in black skin, there are very few photographs illustrating this.

This book illustrates many conditions and therefore has a role as a reference text; however, it lacks detail and seems to be aimed more at the non-specialist who has an interest in vulval conditions and would be appropriate for general practitioners, or those who see vulval disease less frequently.

SARAH EDWARDS